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# HARVEST TIME AT KENGTUNG



BAPTISM OF MUHSOS AT KENGTUNG



AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY UNION  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

# HARVEST TIME AT KENG TUNG



“Great interest among hill people ; wonderfully clear tradition ; many professing faith ; harvest ready.”

**T**HIS was the telegram which, wired from Kengtung to Bombay and thence forwarded by mail to America, brought the news of the marvelous awakening among the hill tribes in Kengtung State and over the border in China. Few movements in the history of missions have been so wonderful in the way in which God has prepared the people for his message, the eagerness with which the gospel has been received and the extent of the movement's influence.

## I. THE PLACE AND PEOPLE

Kengtung is in the far northeastern part of Burma, 200 miles from Mongnai, the nearest mission station, and 373 miles from the railway at Thazi. It is reached only after a long and arduous journey of several weeks across the valleys and over the hills, and lies just on the border between Burma and China.

The people about Kengtung are of many races. On the plains live the Shans, while in the hill country to the north are the Was and the Lahu, the latter including the Muhsos, Kwes and Kaws. The total population of the field is probably 500,000, extending far over the border into China.

The Shans are Buddhists, with the social and religious customs common to others of their race in Burma. The religion of the hill tribes is spirit worship, but the different tribes vary somewhat from one another in habits and customs. A peculiar custom among these hill peoples is described by Mr. Young:

They wore cotton cords about their wrists and in some cases about the neck. These were, first: a pledge that they would not forsake the Muho customs of belief in one God, or drink liquor or follow after any evil; and, second: the cords expressed the longing that the foreigner would

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come and teach them the knowledge of the true God, and then he would cut them from their wrists. When I visited the first villages where they had the chapels, they voluntarily carried all the offerings out, saying: "We have now found the true God and have no further need of these." The Muhso teacher came to me in the presence of all the people of the village and said: "We have now found the true God; you cut these cords from my wrists." I did so, and every person in the village came at once and I cut all their cords. That meant a complete break from the past customs, and a full and complete acceptance of the new teaching. They accepted every Christian precept that I presented to them; and then, after a unanimous vote, we held a formal service dedicating the chapel to the Lord. Since then I have cut the cords from the wrists of hundreds of people.

The Muhsos believe in one God, making no offerings to evil spirits. They are not so superstitious as other tribes in Burma, and are but little addicted to drink. Polygamy is not tolerated among them, the guilty man being put to death or driven from the village. The Kaws, on the other hand, worship evil spirits, but believe in one God, the creator of all things. They lack the spirit of hope and longing that characterizes the Muhsos, and are much given to drunkenness. The two peoples intermarry.

### II. STRANGE TRADITIONS

Our first missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. W. M. Young, arrived in Kengtung early in 1901 and laid the foundations for future work. The following year the first convert was baptized, now a strong bazar evangelist, and during the next two years a few others were added.

At first the work was confined to the Shans, but in October, 1904, the first Muhso was baptized. The day of his baptism two teachers of this tribe and their followers arrived from China with the strange announcement that they had been traveling fourteen years among their people, calling on them to turn from evil and follow after righteousness, "because," as



MUHSO TEACHERS BAPTIZED BY  
MR. YOUNG



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they said, "the true God is coming soon." They said they had just found this true God. They listened earnestly as the missionary explained the gospel and professed to believe his message entirely. Then they told of peculiar traditions which their people held, like those of the Karens, although clearer in some points. They could tell of the creation, the fall and the flood, much as the Bible gives the account. They had commandments, also, almost identical in teaching to the Ten Commandments. They said that God once dwelt among men, that he had gone away but is coming again. The knowledge of the true God was to come from foreigners.

### III. THE GREAT INGATHERING

The baptism of the first Muhso was the signal for a general movement among that people, and by the end of the year 358 had been baptized. People began to come in to the station to hear the new teaching, and such crowds came that the gathering, instead of continuing but a few days as was expected, lasted five months, some coming thirty days' journey. One delegation came from the Was, and investigation brought the most encouraging reports, the people simply pleading for the missionary to come and teach them. Mr. Young planned a tour into this Wa country, but owing to unsettled conditions the government deemed it unwise to permit the journey at that time.



THE FIRST MUHSO CONVERT

During 1905 and 1906 many evangelists were kept in the field, touring constantly among the villages. They preached the gospel, examined candidates and baptized such as gave evidence of true conversion. Everywhere the people have given heed to the Word, and hundreds have been baptized. In

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one month, December, 1905, 1,340 were baptized. Among the foremost workers is Ba Te, a Karen, formerly a strong helper in the Bassein Mission. Ba Te was once a lawyer, and in that vocation received much larger compensation than he now has. He prefers, however, even at a lower salary, to engage in this missionary work among strange peoples.

### IV. DIFFICULTIES

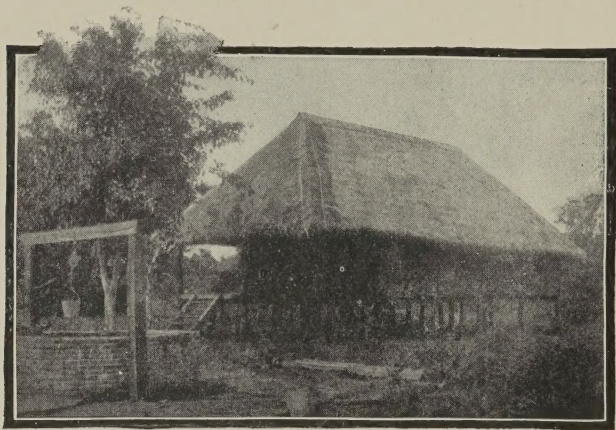
1. *Schools.*—In all the Burma missions much has been accomplished through schools, both as a training school for workers and as a field for evangelization. On the opening of work in Kengtung a great demand for schools was anticipated, and this expectation was strengthened by the almost superstitious reverence of the people for books, even though they could not read, and by their legends of the coming of the foreigners with books and blessing. But to a large extent these hopes have been disappointed. Social customs are directly opposed to the gathering of young people at a central station. When teachers have been provided, no doubt they will be in great demand among the mountain villages; but the difficulty is to get the young men and women to train, either from their own disinclination or the opposition of their parents to their leaving home. There are signs of promise, however. In some sections the Muhsos are eager for schools and ready to build their own schoolhouses. Mr. Young quotes one leading Muhso as saying: "If you want children for schools we will furnish you with a thousand at once." Dr. Tilbe says of the prospective school work: "Once well started it will go with ever increasing momentum."

2. *Language.*—Another difficulty has been the lack of a written language. A few months ago the Lahu was a mere colloquial dialect, with no alphabet. Now an alphabet in Roman characters has been formed, and Dr. Tilbe and others of the missionaries are at work upon a literature. A few pamphlets and small books have been mimeographed, including a simple arithmetic, Mrs. Judson's catechism, simple Bible passages and a number of hymns. The workers plan to take copies of these with them on their tours, teaching the alphabet and making a beginning of instruction in the literature available. "Within a year," says Dr. Tilbe, "there will

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be several hundreds of the Lahu reading and writing their own language, singing gospel hymns from books of their own, and exhorting one another in their Sunday services from Bible texts in their own tongue."

3. *Christian Terminology.*— Even a greater difficulty, however, has been the lack of a Christian terminology in which to express the ideas of the new teaching. Dr. Tilbe thus describes the problem:



MISSION CHAPEL, KENG TUNG, BURMA

In some instances words will be found that will be understood; in many cases new words will have to be coined outright or borrowed from some other language, or else words of their own will have to be taken and used in a special sense that they never had before. After more than two years' work among them it was impossible to translate for them the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology, two of the simplest and yet most essential things in the beginning of Christian work. There was no word for "hallowed," nor for "kingdom," for "temptation," for "evil," for "praise," for "Holy Ghost," nor for "creatures." In the baptismal formula with which thousands had been baptized, a roundabout expression had been used for "Holy Spirit" that was very awkward and had to be explained to give the people any notion at all of the thought.

This difficulty, however, is gradually being removed, as the missionaries learn more of the language and its thoughts and the people come to understand better the intentions of the new teachers.



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## V. MEDICAL WORK

Under conditions which have greatly hampered him, Dr. Gibbens has pushed the medical work among both Shans and hill peoples. With no hospital in which to care for serious cases, he has treated some in his own house. Crowds come to the dispensary for medicine, and many not only seek help for themselves but take back medicines to the hills for others who are sick. Dr. Gibbens tells of one such instance:

Two men came to me seven days' journey in order to get medicine for a man who had "holes" in the bottom of his foot and whose leg had been stiff for nearly a year. They told me with all gravity that the wind entered through these holes in his foot, and passing up the limb and side to the chest, descended into the abdomen and gave him the colic!

During 1905 a total of 6,165 patients were treated, and an effort is being made to put the work on a self-supporting basis. This is found to be difficult, however, as thousands of the hill folk are too poor to pay. This part of the work is bright with promise for the needy and suffering people.

## VI. THE OPENING INTO CHINA

One of the most encouraging features of the work is the vastness of the field. It has been known that the Lahu and Was were found in large numbers over the border in China, but recently it has been learned that these are much more numerous and extend over a greater territory than had been supposed. Over 300 miles north of Kengtung a branch of the Lahu has been found, called the Lahu Min Chia. They call themselves, however, Lawlos, and it is supposed that this is the same as Lolo, the name of some aborigines with whom our West China missionaries have come in contact. These Lawlos, or Lahu Min Chia, Mr. Young describes as the finest Lahu he has met. "The important point is," he says, "that covering an area 600 miles in length from north to south, are found a people resembling the Karens, and evidently of the same general stock, whom the Spirit of God has carefully prepared for the gospel. Who can tell in God's providence what influence these simple-minded hill people may have in bringing the haughty Chinese to receive the gospel?" Indeed, it may be that our missions in Burma and China will some day reach out to each other and clasp hands in united work for these people of the hills.

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Among the tribes over the China border which are reached by our Kengtung workers, are the Was, scattered over a wide area. Their leader, though a Wa, was well acquainted with Lahu traditions and his teaching was a clear monotheism. It now appears that he is one of those called Kai Shin among the Was, or, as the Lahu call them, Bon Shin, "seekers after the good path." They constitute more than half the whole number of Was, and have abandoned their old habits and customs, accepting the Lahu traditions concerning God. They long ago gave up head-hunting and other grosser practises. Through the influence of their leader the whole people have abandoned head-hunting and are calling for the gospel. As Mr. Young says, "It shows that God has been preparing this people for a long time to receive the gospel." Mr. Young and Mr. Antisdel, the latter transferred from Africa in 1905, have begun touring among these peoples and more definite information may be expected soon.

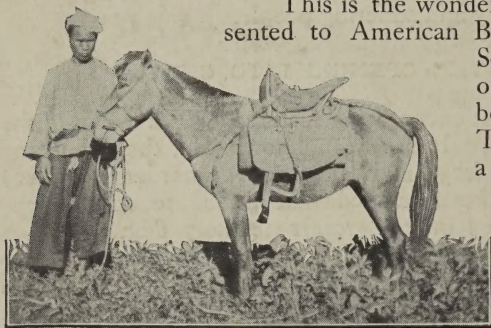
This is the wonderful opportunity presented to American Baptists at Kengtung.

Seldom in the history of missions has there been such an opening.

The way is clear for a great advance move-

ment into China along the frontier of Burma and Assam.

The situation calls for heartiest praise and thanksgiving to



PONY SENT BY THE WAS TO THE MISSIONARY

"A pledge of the sincerity of their desire to accept Christ."

God for this outpouring of his Spirit, as well as earnest prayer that the missionaries and native workers may be divinely led in all their plans and efforts.